

Revisiting Intersectional Identities: Voices of Poor Bakla Youth in Rural Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This is an exploratory study of poor bakla youth in a rural area in the Philippines. It addresses the gap in knowledge since the bulk of the literature on the Filipino LGBT community focuses on the urban setting, especially in Metro Manila and with adults as respondents. Through in-depth interviewing, this paper pays attention to experiences of rural poor bakla youth which are shaped by their disadvantaged position in terms of gender, class, age, and rural-urban location. Using intersectionality as a framework, this paper exposes experiences that have been eclipsed in the Philippine literature on bakla, as well as confirms assertions in the current literature. Unique in this paper are narratives of not needing to come out as bakla, anecdotes of bakla's conditional acceptance in a rural school setting, financial contribution as validation of worth vis-à-vis a marginalized status, androgynous performance of household tasks, and silence as discrimination management. It also

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resonates with the existing literature on the bakla, mainly in terms of experiences of discrimination by a macho figure, and the rights recognition and rights assertion of the marginalized. Among the examined vectors of oppression, rurality is least felt by the respondents as constitutive of their experience. Finally, this research can lead to possibilities of looking at the intersection of populism and gender. As Duterte plays the role of an iron-fisted father (Bello, 2017), how are the baklas identity in the family formed?

Keywords: bakla, rural bakla, youth, intersectionality

INTRODUCTION: THE BAKLA IN THE PHILIPPINES

The Philippines is recognized as one of the friendliest countries towards the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender or the LGBT in Southeast Asia (Manalastas & Torre, 2016), as the gay capital of Asia (Turner, 2017), and as a country with a strong history of LGBT movement (Human Rights Watch, 2017). The wide spectrum of the identities comprised in the LGBT community is captured by the word *bakla*, an umbrella term that conflates gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation (Ceperiano, Santos, Alonzo, & Ofreneo, 2016; Garcia, 2008; McSherry, Manalastas, Gaillard, & Dalisay, 2015; Thoreson, 2011) even though these three are independent of one another. Gender identity is one's inner sense of self (Rainbow Rights Project, 2014) or, as the Yogyakarta Principle puts it, a "person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender" (Corrêa & Muntarbhorn, 2007). A person may identify as a man or a woman regardless of how he or she dresses, talks, who he or she is attracted to, or sex at birth (Corrêa & Muntarbhorn, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 2017). On the other hand, gender expression is the set of external characteristics that a person exhibits (Rainbow Rights Project, 2014), such as dressing behavior and manners. Sexual orientation, meanwhile, refers to one's emotional, affectional, and sexual attraction (Corrêa & Muntarbhorn, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 2017; Kuper, Nussbaum, & Mustanski, 2012; Rainbow Rights Project, 2014; Waites, 2009) to members of the same or the opposite sex.

The bakla is a general reference to all identities that deviate from the normative sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE). This is because unlike other languages that have a term for transgenderism, transvestism, or bisexuality (Rainbow Rights Project, 2014), the Filipino language instead lumps together anyone who is outside the gender and sexuality norm (McSherry et al., 2015). The word gay, meanwhile, is used as a loose translation of bakla even when the two words have differences. Gay pertains to the genitally male person who is attracted to other genitally males (Garcia, 2008). Therefore, unlike the bakla that in effect is used to pertain to any deviant SOGIE, the gay is used under the backdrop of sexual orientation. Nevertheless, the two identities are seen as belonging outside the heteronormative discourse, which is the view that the only two genders are men and women and that assumes men and women's behaviors and subjectivities normatively align with their biological sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation (McGill, 2014). Those considered as non-heteronormative, moreover, become the subject of homophobia or negative attitudes towards gays and lesbians (Landicho et al., 2014). In this effect, many Filipinos use gay and bakla interchangeably because they essentially signify stigmatization (Garcia, 2004), discrimination, and homophobia. Aside from these, bakla also carries multiple meanings that are applied even to people outside the LGBT spectrum, such as coward and confused in the context of some political and cultural discussions (Rainbow Rights Project, 2014) and is thus used pejoratively (Human Rights Watch, 2017). For the purposes of this paper, I use bakla to refer to homosexual males whose experiences are analyzed here.

The mainstream conception of the bakla still falls short of the depths of the character of the LGBT. This is because the image of the bakla that the general public knows is a flattened image (Collins, 2005) that does not capture the wide range of experiences and the various identities that make up the whole LGBT community. But aside from the flattening of identities across gender, there is also a flattening of identities across other vectors of oppression. The struggle of the baklas is not just a struggle of SOGIE because the conflicts that they need to overcome are not just shaped by sexuality and gender, but also by

class, race, and ethnicity, among others (Garcia, 2008). Since the Philippines is a lower-middle income country, poverty trumps all social issues including the middle-class struggle of gender (Tang & Poudel, 2018). Challenges of having a deviant SOGIE, then, cannot be emphasized more than the challenges of being poor (Tang & Poudel, 2018). In the context of the urban poor, for instance, the acceptance of people's SOGIE depends on whether they can contribute financially to the family (Ceperiano et al., 2016) and on how they are participative of activities that are deemed beneficial to the collective (Villafuerte, 2013). A review of literature shows that there is a gap in exploring LGBT identities outside of the urban (Hart & Hart, 1990), adult, and even the economically well-off field. This highlights the importance of examining the experiences of baklas located in various positions in different vectors of oppression. This is crucial both in understanding the plight of the LGBT community and in crafting state policies that concern them. The Philippines does not proactively collect data on the LGBT community which is why the LGBTs are commonly not considered in state policies (Rainbow Rights Project, 2014; United States Agency for International Development [USAID] & United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2014). Invisibility, both a sign and a driver of oppression, therefore, provides a challenge for rights assertion among the LGBT community in the country. Another challenge is the paucity of studies on the varying experiences of the Filipino LGBT and the rights that they should be getting (USAID & UNDP, 2014).

LGBT rights as human rights were appropriated in academic discourse in the 1990s and later on expanded to include rights based on SOGIE (Holzhacker, 2014) when sexual orientation and gender identity gained importance in contemporary global politics (Waites, 2009). But while gender and sexuality are now entering mainstream international human rights discussions, Waites (2009, p. 52) contends that these are still understood as "fixed characteristics of individuals, existing independently of their socio-cultural reality." The way that poverty shapes experience of queerness is also unexplored by the existing Global South scholarship (Thoreson, 2011) in spite of how gender bears on access to resources and fulfillment of rights.

The growing presence of international discussions on LGBT rights is noteworthy vis-à-vis the rise of misogynist populist leaders (Roth, 2018) in different parts of the world who challenge values of inclusivity, tolerance, and respect for human rights (Alston, 2017). Alston (2017), specifically, provides a framework on dealing with human rights under a populist government characterized by its defiance of social conventions which serve as backbone for the human rights discourse. In the Philippines, President Rodrigo Duterte has made his disdain and callous attitude towards human rights (Pernia, 2019; Swenson & Iordache, 2016) obvious. This poses a danger especially to some rights which have not enjoyed core attention like cultural, environmental, collective, economic, social rights, and for the interest of this paper, gender rights. Populism and gender intersect in how Duterte plays the role of an iron-fisted father (Bello, 2017) who is normatively seen as the pillar and main decision-maker of a traditional Filipino household. This becomes more crucial when noted that “populism is mostly associated with (powerful) men” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2015, p. 16).

POLITICAL CHALLENGES, STRUGGLE FOR ACCEPTANCE, AND IDENTITY FORMATION

The Philippines has made great contributions to LGBT empowerment in the past decades and has in fact been home to the earliest LGBT advocacies in Asia (Tang & Poudel, 2018). It is considered as one of the most LGBT-friendly countries in Southeast Asia because it has never criminalized same-sex sexual behavior (Manalastas & Torre, 2016) nor homosexuality per se (Hart & Hart, 1990) when other developed countries, such as Malaysia and Singapore, have done so. But contrary to these, there are still instances where lesbian and gay rights are denied by virtue of cultural misrecognition of their complex identity (Garcia, 2004) and by lack of state programs and policies (Ceperiano et al., 2016).

When non-Filipinos say that the Philippines is very accepting towards homosexuals, these visitors mostly have in their minds the flattened image of the bakla (Garcia, 2004)—the flamboyant, crossed-

dressed homosexual swinging his hips and screaming on television. This view is misinformed. In the Philippines, the LGBT community is still limited in many aspects, be it legal, political, economic, or social (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Rainbow Rights Project, 2014; USAID & UNDP, 2014). Even when anti-discrimination bills were filed in the Lower and Upper Houses of Congress in the past decades, a law that protects the LGBT is still yet to be passed. Republic Act 9262, for one, lumps being LGBT with alcoholism and drug addiction because the LGBT's sexual orientation and gender identity were seen as psychologically damaging and socially immoral (USAID & UNDP, 2014). In the same manner, the country refused to join in on a 2011 United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) landmark resolution that upholds human rights as universal, thereby condemning gender-based discrimination, and that requests the High Commissioner for Human Rights to produce a global study on violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Rainbow Rights Project, 2014). Again in 2013, the Philippines opted out of discussions and abstained from voting in support of a UN declaration that calls for extrajudicial killings based on sexual orientation to stop (Rainbow Rights Project, 2014). Add to this, the marginalization of the LGBT community is also overt in terms of political participation. The Commission on Elections (COMELEC), for instance, disapproved the political party named Ang Ladlad (trans. Coming Out) in 2009. The COMELEC cited quotations from both the Bible and the Quran to prove that since the said partylist is composed of members of the LGBT community, the partylist poses a threat especially among the youth (Manalastas & Torre, 2016), reflecting the very prejudice that has deprived LGBTs of their political rights (Soriano, 2014).

In the face of the apparent focus on the welfare of the youth, however, existing protections for the Filipino youth do not translate to the specific protection of the Filipino LGBT youth (Human Rights Watch, 2017). The Child Protection Policy that the Department of Education (DepEd) enacted in 2012 does not protect the LGBT since school personnel are not trained to deal with LGBT issues. Thus, teachers stick to their preconceived and prejudiced notion of the LGBT. The Anti-Bullying Law of 2013 also does not account structural and symbolic

bullying against LGBT by school authorities. Finally, the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Law of 2012, which includes comprehensive sexuality education, is not yet fully implemented in schools (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

Filipino baklas are tolerated (Garcia, 2004; Hart & Hart, 1990; Tang & Poudel, 2018; Thoreson, 2011). Tolerance manifests when treatment of people still rests on disapproval (Valentine, 2003) and when leniency to people does not translate to legal protection (Soriano, 2014). This tolerance involves accepting the LGBTs so long as they remain in silence and contained in their private space. Once they begin to penetrate the public domain and begin to challenge the norm, they are accused of “corrupting innocent young people, destroying the family, eroding the nation’s morality, and even threatening competitiveness in a global economy” (Valentine, 2003, p. 412).

INTERSECTIONALITY: THEORY AND PRAXIS

The theory of intersectionality guides this research. Intersectionality as a theoretical framework was started by black feminists in the United States (Ceperiano et al., 2016; Collins, 2015; Ferree, 2018). This framework asserts that we cannot understand the experiences of a person in comparison to others only by examining one dimension of his or her life (Desmond & Emirbayer, 2009), such as gender, class, or race (Collins, 2015; Ferree, 2018). These vectors of oppression reflect inequality both at the individual and structural level (Ceperiano et al., 2016; Collins, 2015). Personal experiences therefore cannot be understood independent of the structures that construct identities as well as the structures that maintain the inequality of these identities.

For the interest of this paper, one cannot say that the experiences of the rural LGBT and the urban LGBT are the same just because they are both outside the gender norm and are thus discriminated against. In another way, one also cannot say that the experiences of the poor urban LGBT and the economically well-off urban LGBT are similar just because they are both non-heteronormative and they both live in an urban area. Garcia (2008, p. 5) confirms this by saying, “a kind of ‘conflict’ exists among

the ranks of the urban-dwelling gays in the Philippines,” pertaining to class and therefore identity conflict. The baklas’ experiences are still varied given the different structures that play on their lives outside gender. Beside the mentioned discrimination based on gender and class, this research also focuses on the different experience of poor rural baklas brought about by age and rural spatiality.

Looking at rural spatiality matters because places are defined by dynamic processes of social interactions (Massey, 1993; 2009) that give way to the different experiences in urban and rural areas. Urban areas are generally more economically well-off because these are central areas where various governmental, non-governmental, and business offices are located. Spatiality also affects mobility and access to opportunities because of power differentials (Massey, 2002), which is manifested in the context of urban-rural difference. What it means to be young and poor in a rural space therefore differs from what it means to be young and poor in an urban space, “particularly regarding access to education, health, basic services, communication networks, and infrastructure” (Punch, Costello, & Panelli, 2007, p. 209). Additionally, literature shows how age and gender facilitate discrimination on young LGBTs in poorer countries and specifically in school settings (Freechild Institute for Youth Engagement, 2019; Hung, 2012). Bullying on the basis of SOGIE is common in the Philippines (Human Rights Watch, 2017) and more often than sometimes, school administrators fail to curtail it. Worse, school authorities sometimes play party to this bullying (Human Rights Watch, 2017) by imposing rigid gender norms and failing to uphold inclusive sex and gender education. I explore the age dimension mainly in terms of my respondents’ school experience, but I also added analysis in terms of their participation in government initiatives. Policies are crafted for the youth without the youth’s participation (Ageing Equal, 2018), which provides a glimpse on how youth are politically and culturally hindered to influence decisions that concern them (Hung, 2012).

Intersectionality, however, does not only refer to a theoretical framework, but also to a critical praxis (Collins, 2015) that aims to contribute to the eradication of the very inequality it theorizes (Ferree, 2018). The critical contribution of intersectionality towards social justice

and disturbance of the status quo is emphasized less than its academic merit in understanding concepts and social phenomena (Collins, 2015; Ferree, 2018). This paper touches on both theoretical and practical dimensions of intersectionality as it aims to inform social policies on invisibilized and marginalized identities. This is relevant in populist times because “in a world where petitions for human rights violations could be brought under various categories, conceptualizing discrimination becomes important” (Collins, 2015, p. 16).

DATA COLLECTION IN NORTHERN PHILIPPINES

The study was conducted in a rural barangay located in Ilocos Sur, a province located in Northern Philippines, in April 2019. I chose the mentioned province as field site for four reasons. First, as of June 2018, Ilocos Sur is one of only six provinces in the Philippines which enacted anti-discrimination ordinances (Bilon & De Leon, 2018). The other provinces are Agusan Del Norte, Batangas, Cavite, Dinagat Islands, and Iloilo. The fact that Ilocos Sur already has an existing anti-discrimination ordinance gives potential for further exploration of the experiences of the baklas in the area. Second, the only two cities in the province of Ilocos Sur also enacted their own anti-discrimination ordinances, namely, Vigan City and Candon City (Bilon & De Leon, 2018). This makes Ilocos Sur the province which has the most anti-discrimination ordinances within its local government units. Third, related studies on LGBT within the Luzon provinces with anti-discrimination ordinances are concentrated in Batangas and Cavite. Hence, conducting the study in Ilocos Sur can fill in the geographical gap. Fourth, Ilocos Sur is a rural province. The 2010 Census of Population and Housing by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) indicates that the percentage of urbanity in the province is just 2.6%, just a little higher than its record of 2.2% in 2007. There was no available literature on which specific barangays are considered rural or urban, but the PSA (2013) presents the following criteria in order for a barangay to be considered urban: (1) a population size of at least 5,000, (2) at least one establishment with a minimum of 100 employees, and (3) five

or more establishments with a minimum of 10 employees and five or more facilities. I chose a barangay in Vigan City that meets none of the mentioned criteria. The barangay is also located far from the Vigan City center and is surrounded by rice fields.

I used in-depth interviewing as data collection technique. Interviewing allows me access to what people say and think (Darlington & Scott, 2002), which makes it an apt method given my research questions. This made it possible for me to explore the experiences of the bakla youth and utilize probe questions when necessary. The in-depth interviews are semi-structured in recognition that social processes that bear on the lives of social actors are woven in structures (Darlington & Scott, 2002). The questions are crafted depending on the direction of the interview and the salient issues the respondents identified, thus giving the respondent more agency to determine the course of the interview. The interviews are taped and then later transcribed for coding.

Since I approached the topic through an intersectional lens, my respondents consisted of social actors whose life experiences are located in the lower tiers of intersected vectors of oppression, namely class, gender, age, and rural location. I sought the respondents from a local national high school with the help of the principal. She/he served as the gatekeeper that allowed me entry into the field and facilitated my rapport-building with the eligible respondents. Necessary permits were secured, along with consent forms signed by the respondents. In cases where the respondent was a minor, the permission of the parent and/or guardian was secured before proceeding with the interview. Admittedly, getting respondents proved challenging because by the time that I was at the field, the school year was over, and the students were already on their summer break. But at that time, there was an upcoming festival in my fieldwork city and the school needed to field an entry to the street-dancing competition. Since baklas are stereotypically known as good dancers, I was able to find young gays who fit my criteria. Among all the identities in the LGBTQIA+ community, only the bakla dancers were identified by the gatekeepers. Only baklas, therefore, participated in my study.

This is an exploratory research, hence, participants are not gathered to be representative. Finding potential research participants for the

qualitative interviews can be challenging since the interview will require a considerable amount of time and commitment from both the participant and the researcher (Darlington & Scott, 2002). My first visit was spent introducing myself to the high school principal as well as to the dance instructors who were in charge of supervising the students at the time of my fieldwork. I went back the next day and was able to interview only two respondents who were of legal age. I was able to elicit the participation of two others on the second day, but since they were still minors, I sent a consent form to their parents and guardians instead and just told them I would be back when their guardians had consented to their participation. Also, since the interviews were in-depth and I was only allowed to do the interview during the break of the students, it was difficult for me to get willing respondents. They were not very keen on participating in any research and compromising their time to rest from their dance practice. On the third day of my fieldwork, I was able to interview two more respondents and finally, on the fourth day, three respondents. The total number of respondents for this research is seven.

In this paper, I use the pronouns *him* and *himself* except when describing my two transgender participants. Most of my respondents spoke in their local language and some, in the local language's gay lingo. I did not need any translators since I understood and spoke the mentioned languages as well. This helped the most in my rapport-building because it made my respondents comfortable to talk to me. My respondents' codenames are rooted on the popular terms of endearment in the Filipino gay lingo, hence Badette, Beshie, Brenda, Frenny, Luzie, Mamsh, and Ruth are used.

My respondents come from disadvantaged positions in terms of gender, class, age, and location. They are baklas from families of low-wage laborers in a Philippine rural area. They are also considered part of the Filipino youth as defined by Republic Act 8044 or The Youth in Nation-Building Act, which identifies youth as aged 15 to 30 years old.

The information sheet that I presented to my respondents and to my minor respondents' parents contained the following: information regarding the researcher, objectives and purpose of the study, duration of study, method of data collection, plans regarding confidentiality of

Table 1. The table shows further details about the respondents.

	Luzie	Mamsh	Beshie	Frenny	Brenda	Ruth	Badette
Age	17	17	16	18	19	16	18
Preferred Pronoun	He	He	He	She	He	He	She
Current Year Level	Grade 12	Grade 10	Grade 8	Grade 12	Grade 12	Grade 9	Grade 10
Mother's Highest Educational Attainment	High school graduate	College graduate	High school graduate				
Mother's Occupation	Housewife	Housewife	Domestic helper	Housewife	Housewife	Teacher	Housewife
Father's Highest Educational Attainment	High school graduate						
Occupation	Construction worker	Municipal worker	Vendor	Shoe repair	Butcher	Tricycle driver	None

the answers, plans regarding anonymity of the respondents, and right of the respondent to decline from participating in the study or withdraw his/her participation at any time without any penalties. After introducing the study, the respondents gave consent to record the interview. In cases where the respondents were minors, the signatures of their parent or guardian were obtained as proof that they were allowing their child to participate in the study. I assured the participants that only I will have access to the interview answers and recording. Anonymity is guaranteed for this study especially given its sensitive nature. As an endnote, the informed consent conveys that the result of the study will be shared with institutions, policy-makers, non-governmental organizations, and other interested groups who may have a stake in policy-making catered towards the LGBT in general. This recognizes Arcilla's (2019) contention that the

scholar's responsibility extends even when the academic study itself has ended. Sharing the information with stakeholders, to people who have capital, and to the researched community is part of this responsibility especially in the context of a populist leadership that defies social conventions (Alston, 2017).

Limitations still abound despite the hopes that this research provides in forwarding gender equality. First, only homosexual males or baklas were analyzed for this study. I therefore recognize that the information shown in this research may not apply to other identities under the wide gender spectrum. This paper also cannot suggest or put forth particular policies that will help members of the LGBT community navigate their personal and everyday lives, neither does it intend to provide pieces of advice for LGBT members on how to deal with acts of discrimination. This is an exploratory research that intends to offer productive insights and interpretations, to stimulate research and interest on the topic, and to raise awareness of the varied experiences of members of the LGBT community from a background that is still unexplored, ultimately having the potential to affect policies.

Another limitation to be noted is Garcia's (2008) assertion that unless an experience is recounted from the point of view of someone who is also gay, analyses and studies may tend to be inaccurate and distorted. I am aware that my background and experience as a cisgender woman are different from the respondents in this study, thus introducing the possibility of more analyses bypassing my practice of empathy. Finally, I recognize that there may even be differences in the experiences among poor bakla youth in rural areas. The narratives that I present here are only examples of the issues that the bakla youth in my chosen rural area are faced with and do not intend to capture their general experience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS: EXPERIENCES AND HOPES

Thematic analysis of the responses was done based on the interviews. This matches my method of qualitative in-depth interviewing since I subscribed to open-ended questions and also probed based on the initial

answers of my respondents. The themes are: (1) gender performance as the primary basis of being bakla, (2) conditional acceptance of the bakla, (3) experiences of violence and exposure to macho culture, and (4) rights recognition and rights assertion.

(1) Gender performance as the primary basis of being bakla

A person's gender identity and sexual orientation cannot be identified through the naked eye (Evans & Broido, 1999). Thus, a person identifies himself or herself as gay, lesbian, or bisexual through the process of "coming out." This process is seen as a crucial component of LGBT life that involves acknowledging one's sexual orientation and then disclosing it to others (Evans & Broido, 1999). This, however, does not hold true in terms of the results of my interviews. None of my respondents said that they had to come out to friends and relatives. The responses closely follow what Nadal and Corpus (2013) wrote that Filipino-Americans view the coming out process as an American trait. In a related vein, the work of Chou (2001) on Chinese societies proposed the notion of "coming home" where the introduction of the same-sex partner to the family and the transition to new partner by no longer mentioning the previous one is itself believed to be symbolic for LGBTs. The two processes challenge how gay identity is treated in different cultural contexts. For my respondents, coming out was unnecessary because their gender performance already determines their being bakla.

All of my respondents did not feel the need to come out to anyone because they have already been branded as bakla ever since they were young—so young, maybe, that at that time, they did not even understand the full gravity of the label that was thrown at them. The bakla is in effect a more gendered than sexualized identity (Garcia, 2004). In the case of my respondents, they were called bakla, first by family members, not because of their sexual orientation, but because of their gender performance or their overall behavior. In effect, this can be considered as an exercise of power on a young individual who is perceived to need an adult's opinion on his or her identity (Ageing Equal, 2018; Hung, 2012). I argue, moreover, that this is stark in rural communities where the population is smaller and people can form social relationships with

community members, thereby influencing power processes in the rural space (Massey, 1993; 2009; Punch et al., 2007). The argument is reflected when Luzie said:

Makita da met, ate, physically. Nu adda diay nak gamin balay ket agsusuot nak ti nakiting tapos ket ediy, etoy panagsalsalak. Kwa, agbesti-bestida nak pay. (They see it physically, ate. When I'm in the house, I wear skimpy clothes and then there's my dancing. I also wear dresses.)

Badette, on the other hand, expressed this:

Kasdiay met ket agsala-sala nak met a. Inggana di medyo agkinnikinni nakon. Naki-pageant nak, ate, grade 3. Nadlaw da metten, ate. Han nak immam-amin. (It was because I was dancing. And then I went on to sway my hips when I walked. I joined pageants when I was in grade 3. They noticed it. I did not come out.)

All the narratives on coming out and being labeled bakla are framed in terms of gender performance, not sexual orientation. Among the seven participants in the study, only Badette has experienced entering into a relationship with the same sex. The other six respondents have never entered into a relationship with anyone. This further shows that gender performance trumps sexual orientation in terms of being bakla and is consistent with the Garcia's (2004) assertion. The fact that my respondents are all in their teen years can also be invoked to make sense of their narratives. Some of them are still yet to enter romantic relationships. Badette, moreover, is one of my two trans women participants, which means that her overall gender performance does not align with her sex at birth. While all my respondents were called bakla because of the way they walked and talked, my two trans women respondents are different in the sense that they wear makeup, sport long hair, and even wear female clothes. Badette started dressing and conducting herself like a woman in 2017 while Frenny, my other trans woman respondent, started wearing makeup and sporting long hair in 2015. Both the transgenders and cisgenders in my research called themselves bakla, supporting the earlier statement that the bakla is an

umbrella word for any male who is outside the normative SOGIE (Ceperiano et al., 2016; Garcia, 2008; McSherry et al., 2015; Rainbow Rights Project, 2014). Moreover, it is common in my chosen field site to throw the label bakla to male homosexuals who wear makeup and who have long hair.

The lack of the coming out phenomenon in my results can even become more contrasted when it is considered that my respondents, young as they are, are not even sure of their sexual orientation—or at least not yet. Ruth, one of my youngest respondents at just 16, identifies himself as bakla even when he asserts that he feels attracted to neither boys nor girls. Meanwhile, Brenda and Beshie identified themselves as bisexuals though they confessed that they have never told their family and even their friends about their sexual orientation. Beshie shared:

Kasla mabainak ngamin kanyada, mabainak nga ibaga ti marikriknak kanyada. (It is that I am shy towards them, I am ashamed to tell them how I really feel.)

Beshie's family already has a notion of him as bakla, and he is afraid of breaking that notion by saying whom he is really attracted to. The bakla is pressured to be successfully queer (Thoreson, 2011), which includes forming romantic relationships with heterosexual men. It is taboo for them to be attracted to other genders and sexualities, especially to other baklas (Thoreson, 2011). Ruth, Brenda, and Beshie have not made their sexual orientation public because they feel that not adhering to the expectation that they should like a heterosexual man is something to be ashamed of. Therefore, the process of admitting one's real sexual orientation, amid an already given social label based on gender performance, is the closest thing to coming out in the lives of the rural youth baklas in my study. They are afraid to change an identity that they perceive is accepted by their community because they are not sure that putting forward another deviant identity will do them any good.

(2) Conditional acceptance of the bakla

(2.1) Conditional acceptance in terms of financial contributions and androgynous task performance

The gay identity in the Philippines is only tolerated (Garcia, 2004; Hart & Hart 1990; Tang & Poudel, 2018; Thoreson, 2011) and not accepted because the society welcomes the bakla only when some conditions are met. This conditional acceptance can come in many forms, as shown by the varying accounts of my respondents. For one, the gaudy faggot stereotype is accepted only if he is funny (Garcia, 2008; Hart & Hart, 1990). This funny image sometimes is the only image that the bakla has of himself (Garcia, 2008). However, this comedic character can provide a normative security to my respondents vis-à-vis their deviant identity. Being funny is also something that they refer to in order to float positive bakla characters amid discrimination. Luzie described himself:

As a gay, happy nak met as long as maparparagsak ko ti kapwak kasdiay... bakla ket kayat na saw-en ket mangiteted iti ragsak dagiti tattao... agparparagsak latta ti tattao uray nu- kasla met dagidiay nakad-ado ti pinagdadaanan na ngem haan na nga panpanunuten daydiay nu di ketdi ti lang ub-ubraen na ket agparparagsak latta ti tao. (As a gay, I am happy as long as I make other people happy... when we say bakla, it means giving joy to people... to bring joy to people. Even though he is going through a lot, he does not get preoccupied with his problems, but he just goes on to make other people happy.)

The statement points to responsibilities that society places upon the shoulder of the bakla. Most interesting, though, is that this also shows that the bakla himself accepts this responsibility. The bakla is expected to cater to the feelings of others to the point of sidestepping his own problems. Putting other people before himself/herself is therefore also a conditional acceptance that the bakla is faced with. The conditional acceptance of the bakla can be starkly seen in the experiences specific to their socio-economic class. Attitudes towards the LGBT youth are

favorable mostly when they conform to stereotypes and occupational niches (USAID & UNDP, 2014; Thoreson, 2011). Badette shared:

Ay wen met ate ta syempre ket rigat biag tattan. Masapol met ti agkwa, agsapul kwarta tapno tulungam suda, kasdiay. Syempre ate ket adda met panunot ko. Tulungak met da mama. Makitientiendanak. (Of course, life is hard nowadays. We need to earn money, like that. Of course, I have a mind now. I help my mother. I buy groceries.)

Insights can be gleaned from Badette's emphasis that she now has a mind of her own, and that therefore, she should already help her mother. This cements the assertion that the bakla recognizes the conditions in place for his/her acceptance, and that the bakla tries to fulfill them.

Beshie, resonates with this insight when he said:

Kasla koma tumultulong nak kenni father ko, ma'am, nga mapan aglaklako, ta gamin ma'am ket vendor suna ti kwa, ma'am, kasla kuma accessories kada kwa. Nu awan iti ub-ubraek ma'am, ngem tatta ma'am ket agsalsala nak tatta. (I help my father, ma'am, we go and sell because he is a vendor of things like accessories and such. When I'm doing nothing, ma'am, I do go and sell. But right now, I am dancing.)

The term bakla connotes an effeminate working-class male who lives in the rural provinces (Collins, 2005) and is subject to rigid class and gender structures. The intersection of class and gender is very evident in the responses of my participants when they were asked about their relations with their family. All of them mentioned their financial contribution to their family even without me probing it. This follows the contention of Ceperiano et al. (2016) that the ability to financially contribute to the family is a currency that buys acceptance. This is especially true among poor families who need to stick together for survival (Rainbow Rights Project, 2014). Additionally, the bakla identity has economic sense (Turner, 2017) since he/she can perform the traditional

roles of the daughter, stay home, and do household chores, but at the same time can assume the traditional male role of earning for the family. In other words, the bakla is also expected to perform androgyny in task assignment. In the experience of my respondents, they perform androgyny in family chores as they try to earn for the family (a traditionally masculine role) and also help in household management (a traditionally feminine role). This androgyny is an added requirement for the acceptance of young, poor, and rural gays in my study.

(2.2) Conditional acceptance in terms of romantic relationships and school activities

My respondents unanimously assert that their families accepted them and that they are functional citizens despite their gender. But when asked to imagine how their relatives would react when they come home with a boyfriend, all my respondents answered that their families would not take it lightly and may not even accept that they have a boyfriend. Even Badette, who already had two boyfriends, introduced her partner to her family only as a friend. She recounted the first time that her first boyfriend met her family:

Ay nagtanong sila, ate, kung sino yung kasama ko. “Sino ta kadwam?” kunada. Ay, barkadak lang, kunak, ate. (They asked who I was with. They asked, “Who are you with?” and I told them he was just my buddy.)

Brenda, on the other hand, shared:

Parang sa una hindi tanggap, pero in the past matatanggap din nila kasi natanggap din nila kung ano ako. (Perhaps, at first, they would not accept it, but just like in the past, they will accept it because they have accepted me).

“Coming home” as used by Chou (2001) can be seen in the above instances. The introduction of the partner to the family is symbolic, albeit with limits. This further reinforces my assertion that the poor rural bakla youth in the study experience conditional acceptance. A community may

be receptive of the bakla when he is participative in various activities (Villafuerte, 2013), but this community becomes rejecting when already faced with issues concerning sexual escapades and sexuality.

The expectation for my respondents to be participative is not just limited to the family, however. The school is also an important place for my respondents' life, which came as no surprise given the fact that they were sought out through their school principal as gatekeeper. The school has a lot of bakla students, but despite this, it still has not made the students feel accepted and free inside the school grounds. Badette hinted on transferring to another school because, according to her:

Mabalin ka ag-long idiay, mabalin ka ag-uniform pangbabai idiay. Su nga diay dadduma met nga eskwela, han da kayat ti kwa, kas sika bakla agpapakis ka, agsuot ka ti panglalaki kasdiay ta syempre ket haan ka nga babai kunada. (Those in other schools can grow their hair long. They can wear a girl's uniform there but not here. But in school, they do not like it, they tell you to cut your hair and to wear boy's clothes because they say that you are not a girl.)

What Mamsh had to say, meanwhile, was:

Dadduma ate ket masadot dagijay babakla nga agkwa. Paayaban da kami latta. Paayaban da kami latta, ate, syempre nu awan ti bakla nga maki-join iti activities ket kasla ma-down detoy school. (Sometimes, the baklas are lazy to do activities. But they call for us. They still call us because, of course, when there is no bakla to join the activities, the school will fall down.)

The latter account shows how both the bakla students and the school are aware that the baklas play crucial roles in school events, which still comes under the stereotype of the bakla having talent that can be tapped for certain festivities (Thoreson, 2011). Human Rights Watch (2017) adds that "many LGBT students had internalized the message that their acceptance as LGBT was conditional on being dutiful, talented members of the school community." The above quote shows that students are made to assume these roles even when they do not feel like doing so. I contend

that the discrimination and conditional acceptance experienced by my respondents are two-fold: first, they are not allowed to dress and act the way they want to, but second, they are indirectly obligated to support the events of the school. These students are only allowed to act and perform femininity in cases when the school is in need of it. Moreover, the additional responsibilities assigned to baklas may bear negatively on their academic performance. Add to this, the failure to recognize students' gender identity can be damaging to their self-esteem (USAID & UNDP, 2014). While the DepEd has issued DepEd Order No. 40, or The DepEd Child Protection Policy, that aims to shield children from gender-based violence, actual implementation still lacks monitoring (USAID & UNDP, 2014). Moreover, the Anti-Bullying Law of 2013 also does not account for situations where school authorities exert power over the students (Human Rights Watch, 2017) which intimidates the students to act contrary to their will. Lee (2017) even asserts that gender discrimination hampers students' right to education and right to freedom of expression and goes against the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and International Convention on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

(2.3) Financial contribution as self-validation

The topic of financial contribution comes in smoothly during the interviews. I did not have to probe the topic because my respondents volunteered details of their monetary assistance to their family. Contrary to the literature, however, they do not mention that they contribute financially to their family so that they will be accepted. This makes sense especially because the family has long known, labeled, and accepted them as bakla at a young age. Being able to financially help their family was always mentioned in the context of validating their worth vis-à-vis their marginalized status. Being financially valuable, therefore, is a way for these young rural baklas to resist marginalization and to assert their identities as productive citizens. It is important to note that my respondents are only high schoolers, so the self-affirmation that they get from financially contributing to their family (Thoreson, 2011) is heightened given their young age. Nevertheless, being young and bakla in a rural community

where job variation is limited renders them vulnerable to underpayment. There are niche jobs for the bakla (Collins, 2005) that are usually connected with beauty and transformation (Thoreson, 2011), and employment opportunities for them only lie within the accepted feminine performance of the bakla, such as doing freelance makeup, hairstyling, and dancing. None of these jobs are financially rewarding. Mamsh said:

Proud nak nga naging bakla nak, ate, ta gamin makatutulongak, mapapinpintas ko dejay balay, tas dagijay activities, dagijay dancing kada, kwa, ate sal-salyak met dagidiay. (I am proud that I became gay because I am able to help, like I am able to make our house beautiful, and then I join activities like dancing.)

The insight also holds true even for extended family. Luzie shared:

Kasi masiyahan da met kanyak nu, kasla koma nu bakasyon. Mapmapanak met tumtumulong kanyada. Kasla koma diay kasinsin ko ket, basta bakasyon ket mapan ko aywanan dagidiay annak na. Mapan ko tultulungan suda, kasta nu agpunsyon da kasdiay. (They are happy with me, for example, during vacations I go and help them. It is like every vacation, I take care of my cousins' children. I go and help them with anything, like when they need to prepare a feast.)

(3) Experiences of violence and exposure to macho culture

Most of the violence, specifically physical violence, that the bakla youth experience are perpetrated by male members of the family (Rainbow Rights Project, 2014). This manifests in my interviews. Frenny shared:

Ni manong ko, kasla kami gamin aso ken pusa no agringgor kami. Nagdungrit nak kano kunana. (My older brother, he and I are like dog and cat when we fight. He says that I am dirty.)

All of my interviews point to the idea that physical violence among poor bakla youth is more predominant outside the family rather than inside it. This form of violence is often committed when my respondents

are vulnerable and the nature of the acts are unplanned. These acts are consequences of being in a particular place at a particular time. However, this does not mean that these acts are no longer products of a structure that privileges macho-heterosexuality over other gender identities and sexual orientations. My respondents had recounted varying instances of being physically assaulted in public spaces. All of them, too, cited silence as a response. One instance was shared by Luzie:

Di grade 9 kami, daydiay ket syempre adda diay classmate ko ket nagtru-truth or dare da. Tapos ket nag-dare suna, di kwan ket, daydiay ket pan mo man tungpaen ediy kasla kastoy kastoy. Su daydiay, siak daydiay ediy kwan a, immay dak tinungpa. Isu ediy isu nagsangsangitak. Su daydiay feeling ko daydiay ket, gappu met laeng ta bakla nakon, gappu ta haan ko kaya isudan, haan ko nga kaya nga sumubbuten, isu daydiay isu met iti feeling ko. Isu pay nga nagbutengak idi isu nga nagtalanak lattan idi kinasdiay dak. (When we were in grade 9, of course my classmates were playing truth or dare. And then one of them chose dare, and then they said to slap me or something. And then, they slapped me. So I cried. That time, I felt that just because I am bakla, just because I cannot take them on and take revenge, that is how I felt. I was also afraid which was why I just kept quiet.)

Badette, meanwhile, recounted:

Ngem diay about bully bully ket lallaki laeng ti mangbul-bully kanyak. Adda pay a diay one time ket mabansag nak. Su nga nu lumablabas nak di outside ket tahimik lang ako. Hindi ako pumapansin ng iba. (In terms of the bullying stuff, only boys bully me. There was even this one time when rocks were thrown at me. This is why when I pass by outside, I just keep quiet. I don't pay attention to others).

Luzie's statement recognizes that the baklas are discriminated against just because of who they are. Even the responses, or the lack thereof, of

the bakla youth towards the physical violence done towards them point to the idea that they are cognizant of the limited social spaces they occupy and allowable actions because they are different from the majority. Hence, their silence is in itself a manifestation of their discrimination. The fact that they intentionally stay silent because they fear possible setbacks does not mean that they are unaware of their social status. If anything, their silence may mean that they are aware of their status, and this awareness equips them with knowledge on how to respond to bullies in order to protect themselves inside and outside the school. The above accounts also give emphasis to the failure of the school administration and government to craft policies that protect the bakla students.

While my participants stipulated that they are accepted inside their home and experience violence predominantly from non-relatives, their stories still point to symbolic and verbal violence exerted upon them by family members. Ruth mentioned how, time and again, his family made remarks about him needing to masculinize himself:

Agpakalalaki ka ket nagwapo ka kunada. (They tell me to man up because I am good-looking.)

Mamsh, on the other hand, said:

Tapno adda ti mangdala iti 'pelyedo mi kasdiay, ate. Isu met iti mangmangngeg ko nga ibagbaga da. (So that there will be someone to continue our family name, like that, ate. This is what I hear them say.)

Violence becomes symbolic when its violent nature becomes hidden (Martínez-Guzmán & Íñiguez-Rueda, 2017) under the seemingly normal remarks that people make. At first glance, the comments that my respondents got from relatives about masculinizing themselves are normal, but these comments actually come from, as well as reinforce, the culture of machismo. Being masculine is still desired from my respondents, which indicates that the performance of a hypermasculine identity is still preferred over the performance of gendered deviant. This type of violence is symbolic because it is invisible to many, such as my respondents as well as their relatives.

(4) Rights recognition and rights assertion: Exploratory discussion

I include an exploratory discussion on human rights to serve the goal of influencing policy-making. Human rights are universal, equal, and inalienable (Donnelly, 2003), which means that people are entitled to the things that would give them dignity and worth by virtue of them being a human person. These things should be given in a non-discriminatory manner because race, religion, ethnicity, age, socio-economic class, and—as the focus of my study—gender, should not be a condition to give anyone less than what other members of different sectors are getting. These rights are also interdependent because the enjoyment of one right depends on the fulfillment of others.

Donnelly (2003) introduces the concept of “assertive exercise” of human rights wherein the need to respect human rights and prevent the violation of these rights are pressed. People need to assert the things that would give them dignity as a human person, an exercise done by rights claimants towards duty-bearers. It is already established that the members of the LGBT community do not enjoy the same privileges that cisgender heterosexual people enjoy. This is why, as with the goals of this study, the experiences of the LGBT members are highlighted and made available to the community and to the duty-bearers such as politicians. My respondents, however, had very limited knowledge of the existing policies and interventions that are catered towards gender equality. Only Badette, Brenda, and Mamsh had an inkling of which policies are available for their sector. Badette mentioned that she once joined a city-level dance competition where only members of the LGBT community were allowed to compete. Brenda, meanwhile, mentioned hearing about an openly gay councilor in a nearby barangay. Mamsh also once heard about a gender-sensitivity seminar, but unfortunately, that seminar was only available for grown-ups. Despite my respondents’ lack of knowledge on policies and wider political affairs in general, this does not mean that they have nothing to say about human rights. People are not likely to have any attitude at all about human rights unless they have an idea about the concept of human rights (Donnelly, 2003). This is evident in the answers of my respondents—they clearly had an

idea of the things that they should be getting. Badette, in relation to same-sex marriage, asserted:

Kwa koma met lahat pantay-pantay koma. Syempre sikami met nga pusong babae dapat koma met ket adda koma met ti partner mi ti kwa ti real life. Habang buhay koman. Ken maikasar kami koma met diay simbaan. (I wish everyone was equal. Of course, for those of us who have a girl's heart, I wish and it is rightful for us to have a partner in real life. For forever. And I wish we could get married in the church.)

Brenda, on the other hand, said:

Sana po programa nilang... ang pagtanggap ng mga LGBT po, kasi I think... yun po, kailangan po ng pantay-pantay. (I wish they can have a program about the acceptance of the LGBT because I think there, equality is needed.)

Although my respondents were not able to give me any specific policies and interventions that they want to see aside from the generic answer of equality and same-sex marriage, they are certain that they will attend any seminar or any event catered towards the LGBT. In this topic, Badette, who was the only one among my respondents ever to have a boyfriend, was most passionate. She specifically mentioned the need to have seminars on human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). This shows a lot of potential for promoting the rights of the LGBT members, especially when noted that HIV is discussed in the country's development plans without mention of gender and sexuality (Human Rights Watch, 2017). The location of the field site, on the other hand, may have caused my respondents' limited awareness of interventions that cater to their identities. While it can be argued that my respondents cannot name policies that concern them because they do not actively feel the need for these policies, I assert that this can better be attributed to other things, such as but not limited to, weak information campaigns and rurality. There is a power differential between urban and rural spaces (Punch et al., 2007), with urban spaces more likely to receive interventions from the government given that there is more data from urban communities.

My respondents did not use the words human rights to talk about their rights. However, this does not mean that they are not aware of these rights. The way my respondents framed their rights nod to the negotiation of entitlement stipulated by Lactao-Fabros, et al. (1998). They argue that the way that the word “sana” and the wishful thinking that dominate the views of oppressed sectors presupposes the “dapat,” or the things that ought to be. The sana is a “private, often unarticulated, assertion entitlement” (Lactao-Fabros et al., 1998, p. 233). The above-mentioned concept of assertive rights, meanwhile, is more public in orientation as it deals with duty-bearers. Taken together, nevertheless, the two provide a comprehensive framework in understanding the responses of my respondents. Looking at the way my respondents perceive and assert their rights is crucial given their position in intersected vectors of oppression. Being situated on the oppressed side limits the choices that a person can make as well as the actions that this person can take. Thus, a wishful expression in the form of sana is already a form of resistance against discrimination as well as an assertion of their rights.

My respondents are at a disadvantage in terms of gender, class, age, and rural location, yet their insights exhibit a creative exercise of agency. In an ageist society, the youth are excluded in the conceptualization of interventions that are catered to them (Ageing Equal, 2018; Hung, 2012). Results of this paper, however, show the youth’s ability to comment on their own social situation and make sense of their own experience in ways not yet reflected in the mainstream literature and platforms about the LGBT. Thus, the need to include them in policies as well as include their input is an obvious should-be.

CONCLUSION: UNIQUE AND DOCUMENTED NARRATIVES

The data culled from this study show that some experiences of poor rural bakla youth go in line with the experiences of their urban counterparts. However, the situated identities of my respondents within a disadvantaged gender, class, age, and rural location further complicate the existing literature on the Filipino LGBT.

The young baklas in the rural Philippines do not undergo a coming out process and instead are more depictive to the notion of coming home. They are labeled as bakla because of their everyday gender performance. Young as they are, some of my respondents are not even sure yet of their sexual orientation. One of them identified as asexual while two identified as bisexual. While all my respondents did not need to come out, the three who do not conform to the expectation that the bakla should be attracted to a heterosexual male have not told their family about their sexual orientation yet. This speaks truth to Thoreson's (2011) assertion that the bakla is also pressured to put forward identity performance.

The poor rural baklas in my study feel that they are accepted in the community, although further probing exposes that this acceptance is conditional. One of the conditions that the bakla youth has to meet in order to gain acceptance is being financially valuable and funny. This phenomenon makes sense given my respondents' context of poverty. My respondents' financial contribution to the family, however, is not identified as a prerequisite for acceptance, but a validation of worth vis-à-vis their marginality and exercise of resistance vis-à-vis their experience of discrimination—even at a young age. Another condition of acceptance that came out of my interviews is the performance of androgynous tasks for the family. The young poor rural bakla financially contributes to the family (a traditionally masculine role) as well as performs household tasks such as cleaning, decorating, and taking care of children in the family (traditionally feminine roles). Conditional acceptance is also seen in schools where the poor rural baklas are not allowed to dress and act the way they want to, but they are always called upon when the school needs participants for their events.

All of my interviews point to the idea that physical violence among poor bakla youth are more predominant outside the family rather than inside it. Moreover, this violence is committed by the macho identities that dominate the public space. This does not, however, negate the fact that my respondents still experience symbolic violence inside their homes. Silence is the common response of the bakla youth to physical, verbal, and symbolic violence against them. Nevertheless, this does not mean that they are unaware of their social status. This may mean that they are aware of the social position

to which a heteronormative society has subjected them. Thus, this awareness allows them to decide that being silent is the best thing to do given the situation. Silence, then, is more of a practical defense strategy. Agency gets stifled by oppressive systems, and the positionality of my respondents across gender, class, age, and rural location produce limited options for contestation and self-protection. The need to protect oneself becomes more pressing in a rural community where everyone knows the SOGIE of a community member, thereby making everyone act discriminatorily against people outside the heteronormative SOGIE. The narratives presented in my paper regarding rurality, on face value, may seem generic. This may be so because my respondents have never lived in urban areas, save for Badette who worked in Manila for a year. My respondents did not particularly feel the influence of a rural environment because they have nothing to compare this experience with.

All in all, I maintain the importance of doing this exploratory study. This informs policy-making especially when related with the issue of rights that every human being is entitled to. My respondents are not cognizant of the political sphere nor the government policies and state interventions catering towards gender equality. Despite this, the interviews show that the bakla youth is engaged in an assertive exercise of their rights, not in the public, politically-oriented sense, but in the private, negotiating, and indirect sense of wishful thinking captured by the word *sana*, or in their local language, *koma*. This *sana* rests on a view of the *dapat*, which means that the respondents are able to determine their desires because they are aware of the rights and the privileges that the state owes them. Struggling for human rights does not only entail claimants struggling to demand for the things that would give them dignity as human beings. It is also the struggle of many advocates—who are not mutually exclusive with the claimants—to accept and act on the limited choices that they have. Alston (2017) says that human rights is not a product of consensus. In a populist government that thrives by riding the waves of people's sentiments no matter how problematic these popular sentiments are, research studies such as this serve a grounding tool to equip rights claimants and rights advocates alike.

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